



INCIDENTS

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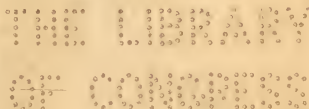
HON. DANIEL WEBSTER

IN RELATION TO THE

LATE MISSION TO ENGLAND.

BY CHARLES SPEAR,

EDITOR OF "PRISONERS' FRIEND."



BOSTON:

PRISONERS' FRIEND OFFICE,

WASHINGTON STREET.

1853.

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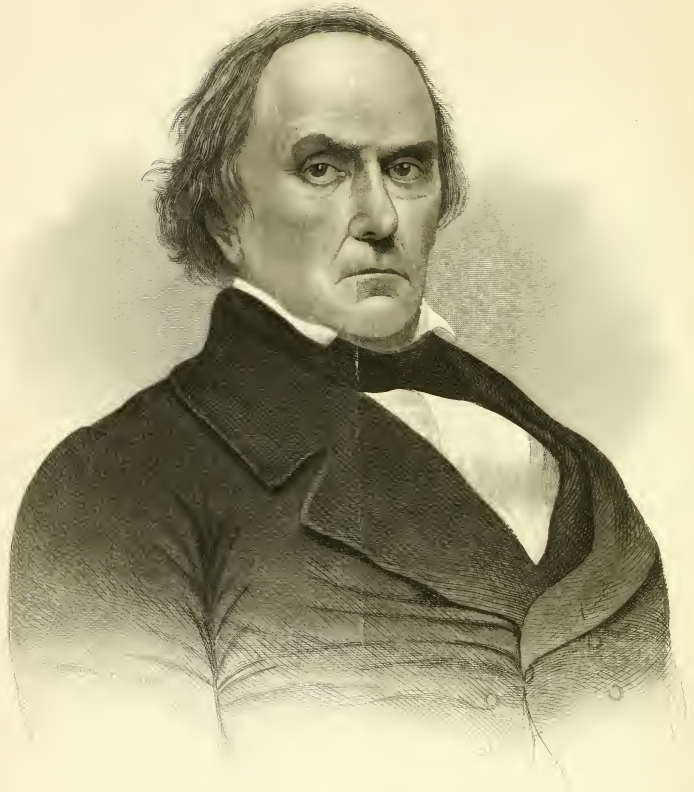


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Gerrit Wolcott

Born January 16th 1765 died October 24th 1822

Portrait by G. B. Kneass

W. B. Allen Sculp.

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IN 1851

Cent. Anniversary

N O T E.

THE following incidents are published on account of the different views which have been held in regard to the Mission to England, and especially to show the part that Mr. Webster actually took in carrying it out.

To show in what estimation the Mission was held in England, the following letter is published, signed by two distinguished clergymen : —

‘The Rev. Charles Spear, from the United States, has visited the city of Worcester on a mission of benevolence to prisoners, and as the advocate of suitable means for their moral improvement. He comes well recommended by the proper authorities of his own country, and sustained by the official sanction of Sir George Grey. He has preached, in this city, in the Baptist and Independent Chapels; and delivered two Lectures at the latter place, to large and deeply interested audiences, on the proper treatment of discharged criminals, and on the general subject of prison-discipline.

‘We have much pleasure in testifying to the piety, self-denial, and general excellence of Mr. Spear, and in commending him to the philanthropic and Christian public of our own country.

‘GEORGE REDFORD.

WILLIAM CROWE.

‘Worcester, Sept. 23, 1851.’

B O S T O N :

PRINTED BY JOHN WILSON AND SON, SCHOOL STREET.

DANIEL WEBSTER.

‘His sufferings ended with the day,
Yet lived he at its close ;
And breathed the long, long night away,
In statue-like repose.

But ere the sun, in all his state,
Illumed the eastern skies,
He passed through glory’s morning gate,
And walked in Paradise.’

No name fills so large a space in the public mind as that of DANIEL WEBSTER. To grasp the proportions of his intellect would be as vain as to attempt to lift a pyramid, or to measure the waters of the broad Mississippi. The nearer you approach, the more do you wonder at the enormity of his dimensions. We can only gaze at a distance ; then take up some trait ; following it up by an illustration from some act in his eventful life. It would be supreme arrogance in us to attempt to portray the qualities of an intellect so grand and imposing. No writer will ever accomplish the mighty task. Words are imperfect. The poet, warmed with all the fire of his genius, in his sublimest flights, will find language exhausted long before he reaches his own *ideal*.* Monuments may be reared to his name, but no monument will ever survive his own works. The human intellect is imperishable as its Great Author.

Our design is a humble one. The incidents that we relate will come more appropriately from us than from any other. A single trait is all we aim to illustrate. The anecdote belongs to no one else. It was not studied. It leaped out of itself. It occurred at a personal interview at Washington, while Mr. Webster sat in the chair of state. While others are bringing out from their incidents

* After the arrival of Mr. Webster in London, where he was introduced to all the great men of the day, he one day was brought into contact with the Rev. Sydney Smith. Finding all words inadequate to express his admiration, he exclaimed, ‘ *Good heavens ! he is a small Cathedral of himself.*’

fresh from memory, we trust we shall not be accused of pedantry in adding to the common stock. We must have our own way in giving the relation. It is intimately connected with one of the most important events in our whole life. We refer to the Mission to England. Having got ready for the journey, we felt the importance of securing a name that would at once ensure attention and respect in Europe. Massachusetts had given its broad seal. Thousands were anxious to see the work carried out. Many predicted the whole would be a failure; and they labored, as men usually do, very assiduously, to verify their own prophecies. Even after we had been appointed, our qualifications were questioned, and, as usually the case, by those who knew far less of the subject than we did; who could not have answered the first question in the Great Alphabet of Prison Discipline. Under these circumstances, the wealthy and the proud supposed that Mr. Webster's soul was reduced to their own diminutive dimensions. Any application to him, they imagined, would meet with a direct refusal. Under these circumstances, we made our way to Washington, trembling as we went; not with doubts of the eventual triumph of our cause, for those we flung to the winds many years ago. But our feelings were entirely of another sort. We had seen or conversed with most of the leading men of the day. We called to mind our interview with Channing, and indeed with men of all classes; but we had never before been placed precisely in the same position. We had once or twice spoken to Mr. Webster; and he once gave a donation, saying, 'I am poor now, and that is all I have. If I were rich, I should give you more.' We thanked him, as we always do. He need not to have said he was poor. He could not be rich. His heart was too big for his purse, and his intellect had little to do with either. His friends looked after him, or he would have been an object of charity. Boston, that adored him, or, as Mr. Parker says, 'bought him,' raised him, at one time, \$50,000. New York agreed to do the same, but failed.

Our errand was not for his gold, but for his name. We

placed one far above the other; and often in Europe did the name of Webster procure admission, where gold would have been refused. Gold cannot do every thing. It has its limits, like every other perishable thing. To continue our narrative. We arrived at Washington. Congress was in session. All was bustle and activity. Ministers were preparing to leave for their foreign appointments, to carry out some political objects. Our mission was of a moral character. Having at last resolved on seeing Mr. Webster, we made our way to the State Department. An hour seemed an age. Everybody appeared to be admitted to his presence before we had a chance. Our turn came at last. Instead of that unapproachable distance that we expected, he received us very cordially. In fact, he seemed to be

——— in his happier hour
Of social pleasure, ill exchanged for power.

He heard us patiently, and then inquired what we wanted. 'I wish your name, Sir. I am going to Europe to answer certain questions proposed by Sir George Grey, and your name will carry me through.' Calling his Secretary, he commenced dictating the letter.* He had not proceeded far, when, on learning the character of this mission more fully, he turned those great eyes upon me, and, with much earnestness, said, 'Mr. Spear, where do you get your money? How do you live?' No other man had eyes like Mr. Webster. There was that dark, heavy eyebrow. We had heard many anecdotes of those eyes; but no one could form any conception of their power without being brought into contact with them. He had

'An eye like Mars, the front of Jove himself;
A combination and a form indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man!'

* See last page. The letter was published in London, at the desire of Her Majesty's Principal Secretary, but withheld from the American press until the entire consent of Mr. Webster was obtained by a personal interview.

To return to the question of Mr. Webster. It was unexpected. We had supposed him to be cold and indifferent, in most cases, to individuals. Men who deal much with state affairs are apt to view men simply as belonging to the great body politic, and not as individuals. They forget that governments were made for men, not men for governments. Men are before all institutions. In reply, we said, 'Governments have never done any thing for this cause: perhaps they should.' Then he dictated for the next line, 'Mr. Spear's work is one principally of charity, and he expects no compensation from any government. I give him this letter, my dear Sir George, in order that he may be respectably introduced into England when he shall arrive there.' This was enough. The whole cause was placed on the highest moral ground; that of charity. There it will ever stand, claiming the support of the humane and philanthropic of all ages. We always had divine authority. Now we had the highest human authority.

On finishing the letter, we said, 'What will this do?' 'It will do any thing you want,' was the prompt reply. 'Is it not necessary, Sir, that the President of the United States should sign this letter?' Rising, with all his dignity and with a look and earnestness that we shall never forget, and with a full consciousness of his own greatness, he exclaimed, 'NO, SIR! NOBODY CAN ADD TO MY LETTER!' This was enough. Daniel Webster could say no more. We dared not ask another question. In that hour he felt his own strength. Here was no political object to be secured; no private project to be advanced; but a great moral mission was to be carried out in Europe; and his name he considered sufficient for any emergency. Then we only had the assurance. Subsequent events, both in England and France, proved the correctness of his assertion. No man questioned his authority. Every prison-door was thrown open for our admission. Even the entire police of France bowed to his power. When others could not enter, we were allowed free admission. That name will never lose its power. Ages hence, and crowned heads will tremble

before it; and many a traveller will be proud to say that he comes from the land that gave birth to Daniel Webster. But our narrative is not complete. It has been said that he would give his name, but farther he cared not. The following will show that he saw that although he had favored a moral movement, yet that means were necessary to sustain it. On seeing among our friends in Boston the name of the HON. SAMUEL APPLETON, he exclaimed, "*Why, Sir, there ought to be five thousand dollars raised for you, in Boston alone!*" That has never been done. Several dear friends contributed to our Mission, and we left for England. What followed has been told in the pages of our monthly: what will follow is known only to Him who knows all things. Some doubts have since come up on the subject of property in letters. Hon. Edward Everett, who gave me a letter also to Hon. Abbott Lawrence, then our minister at the Court of St. James, is appointed, with others, as the literary executors of Mr. Webster. On that subject more hereafter. There are some facts of which the public are ignorant; and, when that demand is made, it will be found that some rules work both ways. Our article has extended itself farther than we intended, and therefore we must leave all for another day.

The subject of our labor had his faults. We mourn over them. The historian must be faithful. Our labor is as a journalist. We are not insensible of his errors. We have brought out for use such incidents as we have. Mr. Webster has gone where he can no more receive the homage of crowding thousands, nor where the golden sunshine of applause or the blackening mists of slander can move his great spirit.

'Nothing can cover his high fame but heaven,
No pyramids set off his memories
But the eternal substance of his greatness;
To which I leave him.'

LETTERS OF HON. DANIEL WEBSTER AND EDWARD EVERETT.

LETTER FROM THE HON. DANIEL WEBSTER, SECRETARY OF STATE TO THE
RIGHT HON. SIR GEORGE GREY.

Department of State, Washington, Feb. 7, 1851.

MY DEAR SIR GEORGE, — Mr. Lawrence has written to the Government of Massachusetts, and I believe to those of some of the other States, for information in regard to the laws of the several States concerning Capital Punishment. The Governor of Massachusetts has certified, that the Rev. Charles Spear, of Boston, is a person well qualified to obtain and communicate the desired information. Mr. Spear's pursuits as a writer and an editor have long connected him with this subject, and he is of known integrity and ability, and he has undertaken to perform that which is desired. His work is one principally of charity, and he expects no compensation from any Government. I give him this letter, my dear Sir George, in order that he may be respectably introduced into England, when he shall arrive there. I have great pleasure in assuring you once more of my great personal regard.

DANIEL WEBSTER.*

To the Right Hon. Sir George Grey, Bart.

Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department.

LETTER FROM THE HON. EDWARD EVERETT TO THE HON. ABBOTT LAWRENCE,
AMERICAN MINISTER IN LONDON.

Cambridge, June 20, 1851.

DEAR SIR, — The Rev. Charles Spear, being about to repair to London, has requested of me the favor of an introduction to you. He is no doubt known to you by reputation, if not personally, for his efforts in behalf of prisoners. Your inquiries relative to Capital Punishment in the United States were placed in his hands by Governor Boutwell; and the chief object of his visit to England is to convey the information desired upon this subject, and to acquaint himself with the statistics of crime and punishment abroad. He would feel himself much indebted to you for any facilities you may procure for him in the way of access to the prisons and penitentiaries in England, and to those persons most likely to be able and willing to aid his inquiries.

I think I ought to say that I do not concur with Mr. Spear in the opinion that Capital Punishment ought never to be inflicted. This is an extreme, as it seems to me, scarcely less dangerous than the revolting frequency with which it was resorted to in the last century. Though differing with Mr. Spear on this point, I believe him to be a conscientious man, sincerely devoted to a meritorious cause.

I remain, dear sir,

With much regard, faithfully yours,
EDWARD EVERETT.

* The reply of Sir George Grey to the Hon. Daniel Webster will appear as soon as it can be obtained from his son Fletcher Webster.



